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Polish Youth's Beliefs about the Functioning of Disabled People in the Family Sphere. Presentation of Own Research Results

Przekonania polskiej młodzieży na temat funkcjonowania osób niepełnosprawnych w obszarze rodzinnym. Prezentacja wyników badań własnych

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SUMMARY

Shaping a positive image of disability is important for common functioning in society based on the principle of complementarity. Only then it is possible to say about the full integration of people with disabilities. Disability concerns not only persons but also members of their families. The subject of this study is to present the beliefs of Polish youth about the functioning of disabled people in the family sphere. It attempts to diagnose the beliefs within two research groups: students and high school youth. Thus, it was possible to distinguish the differences between groups of respondents. The main research problem is: What are the beliefs of young people about the functioning of people with disabilities in the family sphere and are there differences between school and academic youth in the analysed variables? The diagnostic survey method was used in this research. Based on the research it can be concluded that Polish young people are most strongly convinced of the fact that disabled people should be treated in the same way as other family members. Due to the multitude of aspects regarding family functioning, the research should be treated as an indication of the exploration field for further in-depth scientific analyses.

Keywords: youth beliefs; disability; family functioning

Not to be surprised, not outraged,
but to understand.

Horace

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of disability is a complex issue, addressed by different scientific fields. It is an important social, health and economic factor. Disability is an interdisciplinary concept and does not have one universal definition. In order to unify and clarify the resulting approaches, it is possible to refer to the World Health Organization (WHO), which in the International Classification of Disorders, Disabilities and Dysfunctions ICID, established in 1980, defined disability as any limitation or lack – resulting from disorder – of the possibility to perform activities at a level considered normal for humans (Majewski, 1998, p. 64).

In order to solve the problems of people with disabilities, sole knowledge of the essence of this issue is insufficient. Diagnosis is also needed in terms of beliefs, but also attitudes or behaviour towards people with disabilities. As the authors emphasize, beliefs are:

> (…) a kind of lens through which we look at the world, try to understand it, evaluate it, plan the future, set important goals. (…) beliefs are one of the most important factors shaping the lives of individuals, social groups and entire societies. (Cisłak, Henne, Skarżyńska, 2009, p. 13)

Barriers inherent in the social environment, i.e. people, are often more difficult to overcome than common architectural barriers (Larkowa 1980; Sękowski, 1991). Positive beliefs draw attention to the possibilities and positive features of a person with disabilities, while negative highlight only defects, shortcomings and limitations (Sękowska, 1998; Bieganowska, 2005). It is worth emphasizing that negative beliefs, attitudes or behaviours towards people with disabilities affect their health, rehabilitation and integration with society.

A special sphere of functioning with regard to every person, both healthy and disabled, is the sphere of family life. The specificity of family ties affects the way people function in different social groups, outside the family. The high rank and permanence of patterns, which are transmitted to the consciousness of young generations, are influenced by the ontogenetic priority of family impact and the strength of relations between its individual members (Zielińska-Król, 2014, p. 81).

According to the data of the Central Statistical Office, based on the National Census of Population and Housing results in 2002, the number of disabled people in Poland amounted to 5,456.7 thousand, which constituted 14.3% of the total community. This shows that every seventh person living in the country was

a disabled person. Analysing the sphere of family life, it is worth noting that in the analysed community of the disabled, marriages prevailed regardless of gender or the nature of their place of residence. However, every third disabled woman was a widow, while every eighth person was single, and the least numerous group were divorced persons (GUS, 2003). Based on the National Census of 2011, the number of people with disabilities decreased – a total of 4,697.0 thousand, representing 12.2% of the country's population (Janicka, 2015).

METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF OWN RESEARCH

The aim of this paper is to diagnose the beliefs of Polish school and academic youth about the functioning of disabled people in the family sphere. Attention was also drawn to the differences in evaluation of this issue between school and academic youth. The main research problem is: What are the beliefs of young people about the functioning of people with disabilities in the family sphere and are there differences between school and academic youth in the analysed variables?

The diagnostic survey method was used in this research. An author's questionnaire concerning young people's beliefs about the functioning of people with disabilities in the family sphere was used to collect research material. Attempts were made to maintain a certain margin of freedom in the choice and understanding of selected terms from theory (Brestovanský, Gubricová, Libercanová, 2018). An excerpt from the questionnaire concerning the beliefs of youth about people at risk of social exclusion by Anna Kanios, Marta Czechowska-Bieluga, Anna Weissbrot-Koziarska, Renata Krawczyk and Patrycja Zielińska was used. The Likert scale was used to assess the intensity of values in particular variables. When analysing the beliefs of young people, individual response variants were assigned ranks (point values) on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 point meant definitely true, 2 points – moderately true, 3 points – hard to say, 4 points – moderately untrue, and 5 points – definitely untrue. The proposed rank suggests that the lower the average, the more in line with the beliefs of youth.

The calculations were carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Two statistical techniques were used to develop the collected empirical material. The first one was Student's t-test for independent groups, which was used to search for similarities and differences in the assessment of risks resulting from experiencing the problem of social exclusion between high school youth and students. Whereas, Pearson chi-square test (χ^2) was used to search for statistically significant relations between beliefs about equal groups at risk of social exclusion and demographic and social factors. Moreover, it was based on basic descriptive statistics and frequencies.

A total of 1,084 persons participated in the study, including 588 students from secondary schools (high school and technical college) and 496 students of various faculties, according to the purpose-specific selection, from the following voivode-

ships: Opole, Silesian, Podlaskie, Lower Silesian, Lublin, Świętokrzyskie, Masovian, Lesser Poland, Podkarpackie. The respondents represented a wide range of gender, age, place of residence and the school in which they study.

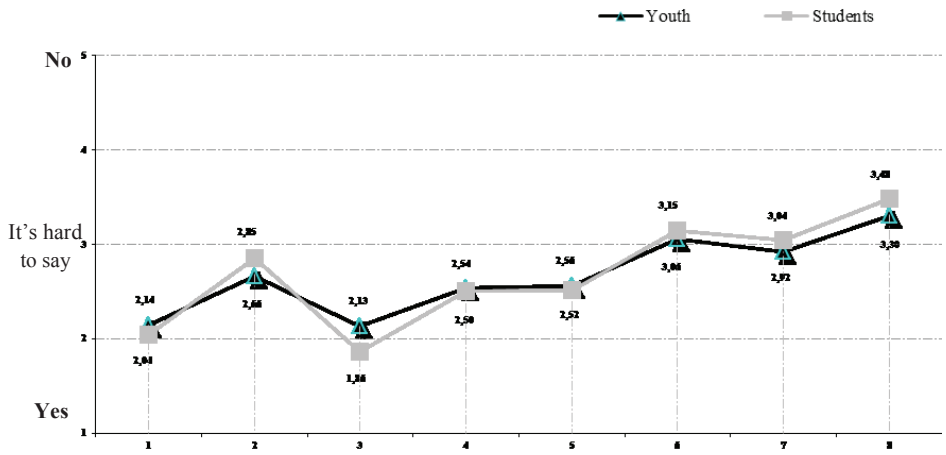
Most of the respondents were women (72%), men constituted less than one third of the total group (28%). The respondents came from cities with a different population. Less than 40% of the surveyed youth (38.9%) lived in the countryside, one third of them (31.1%) lived in a big city. The remaining young people lived in small cities (13.3%) and medium-sized cities (16.7%).

The selection of school and student youth as research subjects was based on a commonly formulated conclusion, which confirms the importance of the school and vocational education stage for building the value and normative basis for the implementation of future tasks. The condition for planning modifying activities (based, among others, on direct contact with the subject of declared relation) is to obtain knowledge of recognized beliefs and their possible sources, which may be the result obtained in the course of education. Moreover, the knowledge of beliefs enables prediction of probable directions of social, political and economic transformations. It enables undertaking actions that would favor the implementation of socially accepted plans or socially undesirable corrective actions (Lewowicki, 2004, p. 7).

RESEARCH RESULTS

On the basis of obtained results (average values for both groups; Figure 1), it can be concluded that the surveyed young are convinced that people with disabilities should be treated in the same way as other family members (M = 2.00) and that they value family life (M = 2.09). The young people agree with the statement suggesting that people with disabilities should contribute to their living costs (M = 2.52) and that they are dependent on family support (M = 2.54). Respondents are of the opinion that living with a disabled person is burdensome for other family members (M = 2.75), and people with disabilities rarely have their own families and live alone (M = 2.98). In spite of this, it was difficult for the respondents to take an unambiguous stance on the statement that people with disabilities are a burden to the family (M = 3.10) and that they should not have children (M = 3.38).

The percentages of responses presented in Table 1 show that more than three quarters of students (76.3%) and almost two thirds (62.9%) of school youth are convinced that people with disabilities should be treated in the same way as other family members. The fact that people with disabilities value family life is confirmed by the statements of 70.4% of students and 61.9% of secondary school youth. Almost half of the students (49.4%) and slightly less school youth (44.7%) agree with the view that people with disabilities are dependent on family support. More than two fifths of students (43.1%) and school youth (42.3%) are convinced that people with disabilities should contribute to their living costs. More students



1 – Disabled people value family life, **2 –** Living with a disabled person is burdensome for other family members, **3 –** People with disabilities should be treated in the same way as other family members, **4 –** People with disabilities should contribute to their living costs, **5 –** People with disabilities are dependent on family support, **6 –** People with disabilities are a burden to the family, **7 –** People with disabilities rarely have a family of their own and live alone, **8 –** Disabled people should not have children

Figure 1. People with disabilities in family life – comparison (average values)
Source: own study.

(41.7%) than school youth (37.1%) express the opposite view to the statement suggesting that people with disabilities should not have children, while more students (39.1%) than school youth (33.9%) are convinced that living with a person with a disability is burdensome for other family members. Despite this, more than a third of students (31.7%) and less than a third of school youth (28.4%) disagree with the statement that people with disabilities are a burden to the family. Almost one in three students (31.8%) and one in four students (25.6%) confirm that people with disabilities live alone and rarely have a family of their own.

Table 1. Disabled persons in the family life sphere (data in %)

Statements on disabled people	Yes		I think so		It's hard to say		I don't think so		No	
	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S
Disabled people value family life	34.0	32.7	27.9	37.7	30.9	24.8	4.1	3.0	3.1	1.8
Living with a disabled person is burdensome for other family members	18.4	8.1	20.7	25.8	43.0	45.0	12.4	15.1	5.4	6.0
People with disabilities should be treated in the same way as other family members	37.2	44.0	25.7	32.3	28.2	19.6	4.9	2.4	3.9	1.8

Table 1. cont.

People with disabilities should contribute to their living costs	15.8	16.5	26.5	26.6	48.3	50.2	6.3	3.8	3.1	2.8
People with disabilities are dependent on family support	19.4	14.7	25.3	34.7	39.6	36.7	11.2	11.7	4.4	2.2
People with disabilities are a burden to the family	8.2	6.8	17.3	13.7	46.1	47.8	17.2	20.8	11.2	10.9
People with disabilities rarely have a family of their own and live alone	10.4	7.1	21.4	18.5	42.5	48.4	16.8	15.1	8.8	10.9
Disabled people should not have children	9.2	5.4	11.4	7.5	42.3	45.4	14.1	16.9	23.0	24.8

Source: own study.

From empirical data and Student's t-test for independent pairs (Table 2), it appears that school youth and students evaluate the following statements differently: living with a disabled person is burdensome for other family members – the empirical t-value is |3.090| at p = 0.002, disabled persons should be treated in the same way as other family members – the empirical t-value is |4.280| at p = 0.000, and disabled persons should not have children – the empirical t-value is |2.530| at p = 0.012. The empirical value is greater than the critical t-value (1.960).

However, similarly, they evaluate such statements as: people with disabilities value family life – the empirical t-value is |1.770| at p = 0.077, people with disabilities should participate in their living costs – the empirical t-value is |0.790| at p = 0.429, people with disabilities are dependent on family support – the empirical t-value is |0.640| at p = 0.524, people with disabilities are a burden to the family – the empirical t-value is |1.450| at p = 0.148, and people with disabilities rarely have their own families and live alone – the empirical t-value is |1.850| at p = 0.064. In this case, the empirical value is less than the critical t-value (1.960).

With regard to the gender variable, it turned out that women more often than men agree that people with disabilities should be treated in the same way as other family members (43.0% at $p < 0.005$; $V_c = 0.120$; $\chi^2 = 14.730$), while they have no opinion regarding the issue that the disabled should not have children (42.5% at $p < 0.017$; $V_c = 0.110$; $\chi^2 = 12.080$).

Young people aged 17–18 years more often than other respondents do not express an opinion on the issue of appreciation of family life by the disabled (36.1% with $p < 0.006$; $V_c = 0.090$; $\chi^2 = 33.780$) and living with a disabled person, which is perceived as burdensome for other family members (42.9% with $p < 0.003$; $V_c = 0.090$; $\chi^2 = 36.210$). The lack of opinion in this age group also refers to the statement that people with disabilities should be treated in the same way as other family members (33.8% with $p < 0.001$; $V_c = 0.100$; $\chi^2 = 39.210$), people

Table 2. People with disabilities in the family life sphere – comparison (average values)

Statements on disabled people	Youth		Students		Comparison	
	M	SD	M	SD	t°	p
Disabled people value family life	2.14	1.03	2.04	0.93	1.770	0.077
Living with a disabled person is burdensome for other family members	2.66	1.08	2.85	0.98	**–3.090**	**0.002**
People with disabilities should be treated in the same way as other family members	2.13	1.09	1.86	0.94	**4.280**	**0.000**
People with disabilities should contribute to their living costs	2.54	0.94	2.50	0.91	0.790	0.429
People with disabilities are dependent on family support	2.56	1.06	2.52	0.96	0.640	0.524
People with disabilities are a burden to the family	3.06	1.06	3.15	1.02	–1.450	0.148
People with disabilities rarely have a family of their own and live alone	2.92	1.07	3.04	1.03	–1.850	0.064
Disabled people should not have children	3.30	1.20	3.48	1.11	**–2.530**	**0.012**

Source: own study.

with disabilities are a burden to the family (48.1% with $p < 0.003$; $V_c = 0.090$; $\chi^2 = 36.330$) and the disabled should not have children (39.8% with $p < 0.011$; $V_c = 0.090$; $\chi^2 = 31.640$).

Detailed correlation analyses also showed that there is a relation between the place of learning and particular elements of family life. Students more often than others do not express their opinion about the burdensome living with a disabled person (45.0% at $p < 0.000$; $V_c = 0.150$; $\chi^2 = 25.750$), dependence of a disabled person on family support (36.7% at $p < 0.003$; $V_c = 0.120$; $\chi^2 = 15.810$) and having offspring (45.4% at $p < 0.020$; $V_c = 0.100$; $\chi^2 = 11.710$). However, they agree that people with disabilities value family life (37.7% with $p < 0.006$; $V_c = 0.110$; $\chi^2 = 14.280$) and that the disabled should be treated in the same way as other family members (43.9% with $p < 0.000$; $V_c = 0.150$; $\chi^2 = 23.900$).

The place of residence correlates on a significant level with only one statement. Inhabitants of cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants more often than other respondents do not express an opinion concerning dependence on family support (47.7% with $p < 0.036$; $V_c = 0.090$; $\chi^2 = 22.150$). Such a distribution of data may be explained by the fact that in larger cities there are more institutions, facilities and units, e.g. volunteers, providing assistance for the disabled. Thus, the family can be to a certain extent replaced and relieved of some of the routine elements of the disabled person's health.

Another difference between these groups was the type of university or school. Students from universities more often than the others surveyed do not have a de-

clared opinion on the issue: living with a disabled person is burdensome for other family members (45.6% at $p < 0.035$; $V_c = 0.090$; $\chi^2 = 37.920$), people with disabilities should contribute to their living costs (51.5% at $p < 0.000$; $V_c = 0.120$; $\chi^2 = 61.960$), people with disabilities depend on family support (36.7% with $p < 0.022$; $V_c = 0.100$; $\chi^2 = 39.940$), people with disabilities rarely have their own families and live alone (49.7% with $p < 0.023$; $V_c = 0.100$; $\chi^2 = 39.710$) and disabled people should not have children (46.0% with $p < 0.003$; $V_c = 0.100$; $\chi^2 = 47.590$), but agree that disabled people value family life (39.5% with $p < 0.001$; $V_c = 0.110$; $\chi^2 = 52.270$) and that disabled people should be treated in the same way as other family members (45.8% with $p < 0.000$; $V_c = 0.130$; $\chi^2 = 70.170$).

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of analyses, it should be concluded that Polish young people are most strongly convinced of the fact that disabled people should be treated in the same way as other family members. Respondents are aware of the role and importance of family in the lives of people with disabilities. Moreover, in the era of materialism, they take into account the financial sphere and are of the opinion that they should participate in the costs of their living. Young people declare that the disabled are largely dependent on the help of family members, and rarely have their own families, thus condemning themselves to solitude. Statements on which the respondents did not have a clear position concerned the issue of remaining a burden to the family and having their own offspring. The research results revealed differences in the opinions of students and schoolchildren. They mainly concerned the issue of burden for living with a disabled person, treating all persons in the family equally and having offspring. However, students are more rational in their assessments.

The diagnosis of young people's beliefs about the functioning of people with disabilities may help to improve the methods and forms of aid impact of various entities providing assistance to people with disabilities. It is also necessary to indicate the need for appropriate education impact at all educational levels in terms of building a positive perception of people with disabilities through the implementation of integration and educational programmes devoted to learning about disabilities. One of the methods is to create direct contact with disabled people or to use media representations. The richness of programme offer and the amount of information on the subject of disability in the media provide teachers with opportunities to choose appropriate content adapted to the knowledge level and attitudes of specific groups of young people (Bieganowska, 2005).

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STRESZCZENIE

Kształtowanie pozytywnego obrazu niepełnosprawności jest istotne z uwagi na wspólne funkcjonowanie w społeczeństwie w oparciu o zasadę wzajemnego dopełniania i uzupełniania. Tylko wtedy można mówić o pełnej integracji osób niepełnosprawnych. Niepełnosprawność dotyczy nie tylko osoby, lecz także członków jej rodziny. Poznanie przekonań polskiej młodzieży na temat funkcjonowania osób niepełnosprawnych w sferze rodzinnej stanowi przedmiot dociekań niniejszego opracowania. Podjęto w nim próbę zdiagnozowania przekonań w obrębie dwóch grup badawczych: studentów i uczniów szkół średnich. Tym samym zaistniała możliwość wyodrębnienia różnic pomiędzy grupami ankietowanych. Główny problem badawczy brzmi: Jakie są przekonania młodzieży na temat funkcjonowania osób niepełnosprawnych w obszarze rodzinnym oraz czy występują różnice między młodzieżą szkolną i akademicką w zakresie analizowanych zmiennych? W badaniu zastosowano metodę sondażu diagnostycznego. Na podstawie analizy wyników można stwierdzić, że polska młodzież jest przekonana, że osoby niepełnosprawne powinny być traktowane tak samo jak pozostali członkowie rodziny. Z uwagi na wielość aspektów funkcjonowania w rodzinie badania należy traktować jako zasygnalizowanie pola eksploracji do dalszych, pogłębionych analiz naukowych.

Słowa kluczowe: przekonania młodzieży; niepełnosprawność; funkcjonowanie w rodzinie